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MEMORIAL DAY IN POETRY

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MEMORIAL DAY IN POETRY

POEMS

CHOSEN BY A COMMITTEE
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NEW YORK
THE H. W. WILSON COMPANY
1927

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Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Published May, 1924
Second printing May, 1927
Printed in the United States of America

PREFACE

As the observance of Memorial Day was inaugurated to commemorate the dead of the Civil War, this collection naturally includes poems reminiscent of those four eventful years. Other poems not dealing directly with that period but similar in character and theme have also found a place. Some of these depict the cruelty of war as it has been experienced by soldier poets. The poems possess literary sincerity, are easily comprehensible to boys and girls and are suitable for recitation at Memorial Day services.

As in the other pamphlets of the series the poems are printed on one side of the page only, so that they may be cut apart and mounted if desired. Libraries can by this method use their holiday resources to their greatest capacity.

The proceeds derived from the publication of these booklets are used to increase the Student Loan Fund of the Association.

Josephine H. Thomas,
Chairman of the Poetry Committee,
Carnegie Library School Association.

19536

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A WAR SONG

Prepare, prepare the iron helm of War,
Bring forth the lots, cast in the spacious orb;
The Angel of Fate turns them with mighty hands,
And casts them out upon the darkened earth!
Prepare, prepare!

Prepare your hearts for Death's cold hand! prepare
Your souls for flight, your bodies for the earth;
Prepare your arms for glorious victory;
Prepare your eyes to meet a holy God!
Prepare, prepare!

Whose fatal scroll is that? Methinks 'tis mine!
Why sinks my heart, why faltereth my tongue?
Had I three lives, I'd die in such a cause,
And rise, with ghosts, over the well-fought field.
Prepare, prepare!

The arrows of Almighty God are drawn!
Angels of death stand in the lowering heavens!
Thousands of souls must seek the realms of light,
And walk together on the clouds of heaven!
Prepare, prepare!

Soldiers, prepare! Our cause is Heaven's cause;
Soldiers, prepare! Be worthy of our cause:
Prepare to meet our fathers in the sky:
Prepare, O troops, that are to fall to-day!
Prepare, prepare!

William Blake

From "A War Song to Englishmen."

THE TRUMPET

Rise up, rise up,
And, as the trumpet blowing
Chases the dreams of men,
As the dawn glowing
The stars that left unlit
The land and water,
Rise up and scatter
The dew that covers
The print of last night's lovers—
Scatter it, scatter it!

While you are listening
To the clear horn,
Forget, men, everything
On this earth newborn,
Except that it is lovelier
Than any mysteries.
Open your eyes to the air
That has washed the eyes of the stars
Through all the dewy night:
Up with the light,
To the old wars;
Arise, arise!

Edward Thomas

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VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

God, I am travelling out to death's sea,
I, who exulted in sunshine and laughter,
Thought not of dying—death is such waste of me!
Grant me one comfort: Leave not the hereafter
Of mankind to war, as though I had died not—
I, who in battle, my comrade's arm linking,
Shouted and sang—life in my pulses hot
Throbbing and dancing! Let not my sinking
In dark be for naught, my death a vain thing!
God, let me know it the end of man's fever!
Make my last breath a bugle call, carrying
Peace o'er the valleys and cold hills, for ever!

John Galsworthy

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THE DAY OF BATTLE

"Far I hear the bugle blow
To call me where I would not go,
And the guns begin the song,
'Soldier, fly or stay for long.'

"Comrade, if to turn and fly
Made a soldier never die,
Fly I would, for who would not?
'Tis sure no pleasure to be shot.

"But since a man that runs away
Lives to die another day,
And cowards' funerals, when they come,
Are not wept so well at home.

"Therefore, though the best is bad,
Stand and do the best, my lad,
Stand and fight and see your slain
And take the bullet in your brain."

A. E. Housman

THE BATTLEFIELD

They dropped like flakes, they dropped like stars,
    Like petals from a rose,
When suddenly across the June
    A wind with finger goes.

They perished in the seamless grass,—
    No eye could find the place;
But God on his repealless list
    Can summon every face.

Emily Dickinson

Included by permission of Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

THE ARMORER'S SONG

Let hammer on anvil ring,
And the forge fire brightly shine;
Let wars rage still,
While I work with a will
At this peaceful trade of mine.
The sword is a weapon to conquer fields;
I honor the man who shakes it:
But naught is the lad who the broad-sword wields
Compared to the lad who makes it.

Clang! Clang! Clang!
Then huzzah for the anvil, the forge, and the sledge!
Huzzah for the sparks that fly!
If I had a cup I would straightway pledge
The armorer—that is I!

Let others of glory sing,
As they struggle in glory's quest.
Let them wave their brands
In their mailéd hands,
While the sword smites shield and crest.
Oh, war is a trade I have not essayed,
Though goodliest fame attends it.
I sing of the one who, when fight is done,
Takes every good sword and mends it.

Clang! Clang! Clang!
Then huzzah for the valiant, the squire, or the knight
Who loveth the battle-cry!
But here's to the swordsman that maketh them fight,
The armorer—that is I!

Harry Bache Smith

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THE TROOP OF THE GUARD

There's a tramping of hoofs in the busy street,
    There's clanking of sabres on floor and stair,
There's sound of restless, hurrying feet,
Of voices that whisper, of lips that entreat,—
    Will they live, will they die, will they strive, will they
        dare?—
The houses are garlanded, flags flutter gay,
For a troop of the Guard rides forth to-day.

Oh, the troopers will ride and their hearts will leap,
    When it's shoulder to shoulder and friend to friend—
But it's some to the pinnacle, some to the deep,
And some in the glow of their strength to sleep,
    And for all it's a fight to the tale's far end.
And it's each to his goal, nor turn nor sway,
When the troop of the Guard rides forth to-day.

The dawn is upon us, the pale light speeds
    To the Zenith with glamor and golden dart.
On, up! Boot and saddle! Give spurs to your steeds!
There's a city beleaguered that cries for men's deeds,
    With the pain of the world in its cavernous heart.
        Ours be the triumph! Humanity calls!
            Life's not a dream in the clover!
        On to the walls, on to the walls,
            On to the walls, and over!

            The wine is spent, the tale is spun,
            The revelry of youth is done.
            The horses prance, the bridles clink,
            While maidens fair in bright array
            With us the last sweet goblet drink,
            Then bid us, 'Mount and ride away!'
            Into the dawn we ride, we ride,
            Fellow and fellow, side by side;
            Galloping over the field and hill,
            Over the marshland, stalwart still,

Into the forest's shadowy hush
Where spectres walk in sunless day,
And in dark pool and branch and bush
The treacherous Will o' the Wisp lights play.
Out of the wood 'neath the risen sun,
Weary we gallop, one by one,
To a richer hope and a stronger foe
And a hotter fight in the fields below—
Each man his own slave, each his lord,
For the golden spurs and the victor's sword!

* * * * * *

The portals are open, the white road leads
Through wicket and garden, o'er stone and sod.
On, up! Boot and saddle! Give spurs to your steeds!
There's a city beleaguered that cries for men's deeds,
For the faith that is strength and the love that is God!
On through the dawning! Humanity calls!
Life's not a dream in the clover.
On to the walls, on to the walls,
On to the walls, and over!

Hermann Hagedorn

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THE ANXIOUS DEAD

O guns, fall silent till the dead men hear
Above their heads the legions pressing on:
(These fought their fight in time of bitter fear
And died not knowing how the day had gone.)

O flashing muzzles, pause, and let them see
The coming dawn that streaks the day afar:
Then let your mighty chorus witness be
To them, and Caesar, that we still make war.

Tell them, O guns, that we have heard their call,
That we have sworn, and will not turn aside,
That we will onward, till we win or fall,
That we will keep the faith for which they died.

Bid them be patient, and some day, anon,
They shall feel earth enwrapt in silence deep,
Shall greet, in wonderment, the quiet dawn,
And in content may turn them to their sleep.

John McCrae

From "In Flanders Fields," by John McCrae.
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THE DUG-OUT

Why do you lie with your legs ungainly huddled,
And one arm bent across your sullen cold
Exhausted face? It hurts my heart to watch you,
Deep-shadowed from the candle's guttering gold;
And you wonder why I shake you by the shoulder;
Drowsy, you mumble and sigh and turn your head. . .
You are too young to fall asleep for ever;
And when you sleep you remind me of the dead.

Siegfried Sassoon

Winston-Salem, N.C. 27108

THE MESSAGES

"I cannot quite remember . . . There were five
Dropt dead beside me in the trench—and three
Whispered their dying messages to me . . . "

Back from the trenches, more dead than alive,
Stone-deaf and dazed, and with a broken knee,
He hobbled slowly, muttering vacantly:

"I cannot quite remember . . . There were five
Dropt dead beside me in the trench—and three
Whispered their dying messages to me. . . .

"Their friends are waiting, wondering how they thrive—
Waiting a word in silence patiently . . .
But what they said, or who their friends may be

"I cannot quite remember . . . There were five
Dropt dead beside me in the trench—and three
Whispered their dying messages to me. . . ."

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

From the "Poems" of Wilfrid Wilson Gibson.
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BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored,
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword;
His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps,
I can read his righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps;
His day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel, writ in burnished rows of steel;
"As ye deal with My contemners, so with you My grace shall deal:
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,
Since God is marching on."

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat:
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him,—be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me:
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

Julia Ward Howe

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THE REVEILLE

Hark! I hear the tramp of thousands,
And of armed men the hum;
Lo! a nation's hosts have gathered
Round the quick alarming drum,—
Saying, "Come,
Freemen, come!
Ere your heritage be wasted," said the quick alarming drum.

"Let me of my heart take counsel;
War is not of life the sum.
Who shall stay and reap the harvest
When the autumn days shall come?"
But the drum
Echoed, "Come!
Death shall reap the braver harvest," said the solemn-sounding drum.

"But when won the coming battle,
What of profit springs therefrom?
What if conquest, subjugation,
Even greater ills become?"
But the drum
Answered, "Come!
You must do the sum to prove it," said the Yankee answering drum.

Thus they answered,—hoping, fearing,
Some in faith, and doubting some,
Till a trumpet-voice, proclaiming,
Said, "My chosen people, come!"
Then the drum,
Lo! was dumb,
For the great heart of the nation, throbbing, answered, "Lord, we come!"

Bret Harte

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STANZAS ON FREEDOM

Men! whose boast it is that ye
Come of fathers brave and free,
If there breathe on earth a slave,
Are ye truly free and brave?
If ye do not feel the chain,
When it works a brother's pain,
Are ye not base slaves indeed,
Slaves unworthy to be freed?

Women! who shall one day bear
Sons to breathe New England air,
If ye hear, without a blush,
Deeds to make the roused blood rush
Like red lava through your veins,
For your sisters now in chains—
Answer! are ye fit to be
Mothers of the brave and free?

Is true Freedom but to break
Fetters for our own dear sake,
And, with leathern hearts, forget
That we owe mankind a debt?
No! true freedom is to share
All the chains our brothers wear,
And, with heart and hand, to be
Earnest to make others free!

They are slaves who fear to speak
For the fallen and the weak;
They are slaves who will not choose
Hatred, scoffing, and abuse,
Rather than in silence shrink
From the truth they needs must think;
They are slaves who dare not be
In the right with two or three.

James Russell Lowell

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UNDER THE STARS

Tell me what sail the seas
Under the stars?
Ships, and ships' companies
Off to the wars.

Steel are the ships' great sides,
Steel every gun,
Backward they thrust the tides,
Swiftly they run.

Steel is the sailor's heart,
Stalwart his arm,
His the Republic's part
Thro' cloud and storm.

Tell me what colors there
Stream from the spars?
Red stripes and white they bear,
Blue, with bright stars:

Red for brave hearts that burn
With liberty,
White for the peace they earn
Making men free,

Stars for the Heaven above,
Blue for the deep—
Where in their country's love
Heroes shall sleep.

Tell me why on the breeze
These banners blow?
Ships, and ships' companies,
Eagerly go

Warring, like all our line,
    Freedom to friend,
Under this starry sign
    True to the end.

Fair is the Flag's renown,
    Sacred her scars,
Sweet the death she shall crown
    Under the stars.

Wallace Rice

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JOHN BURNS OF GETTYSBURG

Have you heard the story that gossips tell
Of Burns of Gettysburg? No? Ah, well:
Brief is the glory that hero earns,
Briefer the story of poor John Burns;
He was the fellow who won renown,—
The only man who didn't back down
When the rebels rode through his native town;
But held his own in the fight next day,
When all his townsfolk ran away.
That was in July, sixty-three,—
The very day that General Lee,
Flower of Southern chivalry,
Baffled and beaten, backward reeled
From a stubborn Meade and a barren field.

I might tell how, but the day before
John Burns stood at his cottage door,
Looking down the village street,
Where, in the shade of his peaceful vine,
He heard the low of his gathered kine,
And felt their breath with incense sweet;
Or, I might say, when the sunset burned
The old farm gable, he thought it turned
The milk that fell like a babbling flood
Into the milk-pail, red as blood;
Or, how he fancied the hum of bees
Were bullets buzzing among the trees.
But all such fanciful thoughts as these
Were strange to a practical man like Burns,
Who minded only his own concerns,
Troubled no more by fancies fine
Than one of his calm-eyed, long-tailed kine,—
Quite old-fashioned and matter-of-fact,
Slow to argue, but quick to act.
That was the reason, as some folk say,
He fought so well on that terrible day.

And it was terrible. On the right
Raged for hours the heady fight,
Thundered the battery's double bass,—
Difficult music for men to face;
While on the left,—where now the graves
Undulate like the living waves
That all the day unceasing swept
Up to the pits the rebels kept,—
Round-shop ploughed the upland glades,
Sown with bullets, reaped with blades;
Shattered fences here and there,
Tossed their splinters in the air;
The very trees were stripped and bare;
The barns that once held yellow grain
Were heaped with harvests of the slain;
The cattle bellowed on the plain,
The turkeys screamed with might and main,
And brooding barn-fowl left their rest
With strange shells bursting in each nest.

Just where the tide of battle turns,
Erect and lonely, stood old John Burns.
How do you think the man was dressed?
He wore an ancient, long buff vest,
Yellow as saffron,—but his best;
And buttoned over his manly breast
Was a bright blue coat with a rolling collar,
And large gilt buttons,—size of a dollar,—
With tails that the country-folk called "swaller".
He wore a broad-brimmed, bell-crowned hat,
White as the locks on which it sat.
Never had such a sight been seen
For forty years on the village green,
Since old John Burns was a country beau,
And went to the "quiltings" long ago.

Close at his elbows all that day,
Veterans of the Peninsula,
Sunburnt and bearded, charged away;
And striplings, downy of lip and chin,—
Clerks that the Home-guard mustered in,—
Glanced, as they passed, at the hat he wore,
Then at the rifle his right hand bore;
And hailed him, from out their youthful lore,
With scraps of a slangy repertoire:
"How are you, White Hat?" "Put her through!"
"Your head's level!" and "Bully for you!"
Called him "Daddy,"—begged he'd disclose
The name of the tailor who made his clothes,
And what was the value he set on those;
While Burns, unmindful of jeer and scoff,
Stood there picking the rebels off,—
With his long brown rifle, and bell-crowned hat,
And the swallow-tails they were laughing at.

'Twas but a moment, for that respect
Which clothes all courage their voices checked;
And something the wildest could understand
Spake in the old man's strong right hand,
And his corded throat, and the lurking frown
Of his eyebrows under his old bell-crown;
Until, as they gazed, there crept an awe
Through the ranks in whispers, and some men saw,
In the antique vestments and long white hair,
The Past of the Nation in battle there;
And some of the soldiers since declare
That the gleam of his old white hat afar,
Like the crested plume of the brave Navarre,
That day was their oriflamme of war.
Thus raged the battle. You know the rest;
How the rebels, beaten, and backward pressed,
Broke at the final charge and ran.
At which John Burns,—a practical man—
Shouldered his rifle, unbent his brows,
And then went back to his bees and cows.

That is the story of old John Burns;
This is the moral the reader learns:
In fighting the battle, the question's whether
You'll show a hat that's white, or a feather.

Bret Harte

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SHERIDAN'S RIDE

Up from the south, at break of day,
Bringing to Winchester fresh dismay,
The affrighted air with a shudder bore,
Like a herald in haste to the chieftain's door,
The terrible grumble, and rumble, and roar,
Telling the battle was on once more,
And Sheridan twenty miles away.

And wider still those billows of war
Thunder'd along the horizon's bar;
And louder yet into Winchester roll'd
The roar of that red sea uncontroll'd,
Making the blood of the listener cold,
As he thought of the stake in that fiery fray,
With Sheridan twenty miles away.

But there is a road from Winchester town,
A good broad highway leading down:
And there, through the flush of the morning light,
A steed as black as the steeds of night
Was seen to pass, as with eagle flight,
As if he knew the terrible need,
He stretch'd away with his utmost speed;
Hills rose and fell; but his heart was gay,
With Sheridan fifteen miles away.

Still sprang from those swift hoofs, thundering south,
The dust like smoke from the cannon's mouth,
Or the trail of a comet, sweeping faster and faster,
Foreboding to traitors the doom of disaster.
The heart of the steed and the heart of the master
Were beating like prisoners assaulting their walls,
Impatient to be where the battle-field calls;
Every nerve of the charger was strained to full play,
With Sheridan only ten miles away.

Under his spurring feet, the road
Like an arrowy Alpine river flow'd,
And the landscape sped away behind
Like an ocean flying before the wind;
And the steed, like a bark fed with furnace ire,
Swept on, with his wild eye full of fire.
But, lo! he is nearing his heart's desire;
He is snuffing the smoke of the rearing fray,
With Sheridan only five miles away.

The first that the general saw were the groups
Of stragglers, and then the retreating troops;
What was done? what to do? a glance told him both.
Then striking his spurs with a terrible oath,
He dash'd down the line, 'mid a storm of huzzas,
And the wave of retreat checked its course there, because
The sight of the master compell'd it to pause.
With foam and with dust the black charger was gray;
By the flash of his eye, and the red nostril's play,
He seem'd to the whole great army to say:
"I have brought you Sheridan all the way
From Winchester down to save the day."

Hurrah! hurrah for Sheridan!
Hurrah! hurrah for horse and man!
And when their statues are placed on high,
Under the dome of the Union sky,
The American soldier's Temple of Fame,
There with the glorious general's name
Be it said, in letters both bold and bright:
"Here is the steed that saved the day
By carrying Sheridan into the fight,
From Winchester,—twenty miles away!"

Thomas Buchanan Read

ROLL-CALL

"Corporal Green!" the orderly cried;
"Here!" was the answer loud and clear,
From the lips of a soldier who stood near,—
And "Here!" was the word the next replied.

"Cyrus Drew!"—then a silence fell;
This time no answer followed the call;
Only his rear-man had seen him fall:
Killed or wounded—he could not tell.

There they stood in the failing light,
These men of battle with grave, dark looks,
As plain to be read as open books,
While slowly gathered the shades of night.

The fern on the hillsides were splashed with blood,
And down in the corn, where the poppies grew,
Were redder stains than the poppies knew,
And crimson-dyed was the river's flood.

For the foe had crossed from the other side,
That day, in the face of a murderous fire
That swept them down in its terrible ire;
And their life-blood went to color the tide.

"Herbert Cline!"—At the call there came
Two stalwart soldiers into the line,
Bearing between them this Herbert Cline,
Wounded and bleeding to answer his name.

"Ezra Kerr!"—and a voice answered "Here!"
"Hiram Kerr!"—but no man replied.
They were brothers, these two; the sad wind sighed,
And a shudder crept through the cornfield near.

"Ephraim Deane!"—then a soldier spoke:
"Deane carried our regiment's colors," he said,
"When our ensign was shot; I left him dead
Just after the enemy wavered and broke.

"Close by the roadside his body lies;
I paused a moment and gave him to drink;
He murmured his mother's name, I think,
And Death came with it and closed his eyes."

'Twas a victory—yes; but it cost us dear:
For that company's roll, when called at night,
Of a hundred men who went into the fight,
Numbered but twenty that answered "*Here!*"

Nathaniel Graham Shepherd

ODE RECITED AT THE HARVARD COMMEMORATION

(*Selections*)

I with uncovered head
Salute the sacred dead,
Who went, and who return not.—Say not so!
'Tis not the grapes of Canaan that repay,
But the high faith that failed not by the way;
Virtue treads paths that end not in the grave;
No ban of endless night exiles the brave;
And to the saner mind
We rather seem the dead that stayed behind.
Blow, trumpets, all your exultations blow!
For never shall their aureoled presence lack:
I see them muster in a gleaming row,
With ever-youthful brows that nobler show;
We find in our dull road their shining track;
In every nobler mood
We feel the orient of their spirit glow,
Part of our life's unalterable good,
Of all our saintlier aspiration;
They come transfigured back,
Secure from change in their high-hearted ways,
Beautiful evermore, and with the rays
Of morn on their white Shields of Expectation!

Bow down, dear Land, for thou hast found release!
Thy God, in these distempered days,
Hath taught thee the sure wisdom of His ways,
And through thine enemies hath wrought thy peace!
Bow down in prayer and praise!
No poorest in thy borders but may now
Lift to the juster skies a man's enfranchised brow.
O Beautiful! my Country! ours once more!
Smoothing thy gold of war-dishevelled hair
O'er such sweet brows as never other wore,
And letting thy set lips,
Freed from wrath's pale eclipse,

The rosy edges of their smile lay bare,
What words divine of lover or of poet
Could tell our love and make thee know it,
Among the Nations bright beyond compare?
What were our lives without thee?
What all our lives to save thee?
We reck not what we gave thee;
We will not dare to doubt thee,
But ask whatever else, and we will dare!

James Russell Lowell

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KILLED AT THE FORD

He is dead, the beautiful youth,
The heart of honor, the tongue of truth,
He, the life and light of us all,
Whose voice was blithe as a bugle-call,
Whom all eyes followed with one consent,
The cheer of whose laugh, and whose pleasant word,
Hushed all murmurs of discontent.

Only last night, as we rode along,
Down the dark of the mountain gap,
To visit the picket-guard at the ford,
Little dreaming of any mishap,
He was humming the words of some old song:
"Two red roses he had on his cap
And another he bore at the point of his sword."

Sudden and swift a whistling ball
Came out of a wood, and the voice was still;
Something I heard in the darkness fall,
And for a moment my blood grew chill;
I spake in a whisper, as he who speaks
In a room where some one is lying dead;
But he made no answer to what I said.

We lifted him up to his saddle again,
And through the mire and the mist and the rain
Carried him back to the silent camp,
And laid him as if asleep on his bed;
And I saw by the light of the surgeon's lamp
Two white roses upon his cheeks,
And one, just over his heart, blood-red!

And I saw in a vision how far and fleet
That fatal bullet went speeding forth,
Till it reached a town in the distant North,
Till it reached a house in a sunny street,
Till it reached a heart that ceased to beat
Without a murmur, without a cry;
And a bell was tolled in that far-off town,
For one who had passed from cross to crown,
And the neighbors wondered that she should die.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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NIGHT AT GETTYSBURG

By day Golgotha sleeps, but when night comes
The army rallies to the beating drums;
Columns are formed and banners wave
O'er armies summoned from the grave.

The wheat field waves with reddened grain
And the wounded wail and writhe in pain.
The hard-held Bloody Angle drips anew
And Pickett charges with a ghostly crew.

While where the road to the village turns
Stands the tall shadow of old John Burns!

Don C. Seitz

From "In Praise of War," by Don C. Seitz.
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NO MORE THE THUNDER OF CANNON

No more the thunder of cannon,
    No more the clashing of swords,
No more the rage of the contest,
    Nor the rush of contending hordes;
But, instead, the glad reunion,
    The clasping of friendly hands,
The song, for the shout of battle,
    Heard over the waiting lands.

O brothers, to-night we greet you
    With smiles, half sad, half gay—
For our thoughts are flying backward
    To the years so far away—
When with you who were part of the conflict,
    With us who remember it all,
Youth marched with his waving banner,
    And his voice like a bugle call!

We would not turn back the dial,
    Nor live over the past again;
We would not the path re-travel,
    Nor barter the "now" for the "then."
Yet, oh, for the bounding pulses,
    And the strength to do and dare,
When life was one grand endeavor,
    And work clasped hands with prayer!

But blessed are ye, O brothers,
    Who feel in your souls alway
The thrill of the stirring summons
    You heard but to obey;
Who, whether the years go swift,
    Or whether the years go slow,
Will wear in your hearts forever
    The glory of long ago!

Julia C. R. Dorr

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DECORATION DAY

From many a field with patriot blood imbrued,
From many a scene of suffering and despond,
From many a dark ravine and rushy pond,
From many a wilderness and solitude,
From many a wreck in ocean caverns strewed,
From many a stately tomb and lowly mound,
The spirits of the slaughtered brave respond,
The martyrs of that host, in civil feud,

Which staked for Union lives and all. They leapt
To save the Constitution and the State;
They fought for liberty and right; they died,
Unselfishly, in Freedom's cause. Men wept,
To see such sacrifice, though love so great,
Such deeds of valor, swelled their hearts with pride.

George Hurlbut Barbour

She saw the bayonets flashing in the sun,
The flags that proudly waved; she heard the bugles calling;
She saw the tattered banners falling
About the broken staffs, as one by one
The remnant of the mighty army past;
And at the last
Flowers for the graves of those whose fight was done.

She heard the tramping of ten thousand feet
As the long line swept round the crowded square;
She heard the incessant hum
That filled the warm and blossom-scented air—
The shrilling fife, the roll and throb of drum,
The happy laugh, the cheer. O, glorious and meet
To honor thus the dead,
Who chose the better part,
Who for their country bled!
—The dead! Great God! she stood there in the street,
Living, yet dead in soul and mind and heart—
While far away
His grave was deckt with flowers by strangers' hands to-day.

Richard Watson Gilder.

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SONG FOR MEMORIAL DAY

Let us to-day,
Who breathe the final sweetness of the May,
Bring the enwreathéd bay
For those who trod the sacrificial way!
O sacred sod,
And O endearéd dust,
Thus would we keep our trust,—
Our trust which is remembrance, and the just
Tribute to those who fought and found their God!

Not with Love's melting eyes
Bending above them did they drop the mould
Of their mortality, and watch unfold
The bright celestial skies;
The face they saw
Was red-envisaged Battle, with the awe
Of thunders round about him wide unrolled;
Not upon fair white wings, but wings of flame,
The summoning vision came.

In many a garden-close
The year's first rose
Opens its perfumed petals to the day;
Then twine these with the bay,
These tokens redolent, that they may be
As fires about the shrine of Memory,
Making perennially sweet the airs
Whereon are borne our prayers!

Our prayers!—Yea, let us lift them! Those that sleep
Have won the last great conflict, gained the crown
Of radiance and renown,
Leaving us warders of their heritage;
Be our beseechment, then, that we may keep
The land for which they bled
(Loyal and laureled dead!)
Unsullied as their courage, a white light
Of peace and purity in all men's sight
For the unfolding age!

Clinton Scollard

Included by permission of the author.

DECORATION DAY

Sleep, comrades, sleep and rest
    On this Field of the Grounded Arms,
Where foes no more molest,
    Nor sentry's shot alarms!

Ye have slept on the ground before,
    And started to your feet
At the cannon's sudden roar,
    Or the drum's redoubling beat.

But in this Camp of Death
    No sound your slumber breaks;
Here is no fevered breath,
    No wound that bleeds and aches.

All is repose and peace,
    Untrampled lies the sod;
The shouts of battle cease,
    It is the truce of God!

Rest, comrade, rest and sleep!
    The thoughts of men shall be
As sentinels to keep
    Your rest from danger free.

Your silent tents of green
    We deck with fragrant flowers;
Yours has the suffering been,
    The memory shall be ours.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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DECORATING THE SOLDIERS' GRAVES

A silent bivouac of the dead, we say,
While on the low green tents we lay our flowers,
And with soft tread we take our reverent way
Past where each seems to sleep away the hours.

A *silent* bivouac? Nay, they sleep not here:
They have passed on; and, gleaming bright ahead,
Their camp-fires on yon heights of truth appear,
Lighting the way that coming feet shall tread.

Their shot-torn flags still wave upon the air,
There where some new heroic deed is done;
And, echoing loud, their shout still ringeth where
Some new field waits, by brave hearts to be won.

The brave die never, though they sleep in dust:
Their courage nerves a thousand living men,
Who seize and carry on the sacred trust,
And win their noble victories o'er again.

Their graves are cradles of the purpose high
That led them on the weary march, and through
The battles where the dying do not die,
But live forever in the deeds they do.

And from these cradles rise the coming years,—
The dead souls resurrected,—still to keep
The memory of those times of blood and tears,
And carry on the work of those who sleep.

And thus the silent bivouac of the dead
Finds voice, and thrills with throbbing life today;
And we, who softly by their green tents tread,
Will hear and heed the noble words they say.

Minot J. Savage

DECORATION DAY

Earth from her winter slumber breaks;
The morning of the year awakes.
The vital warmth that buried lay
Transcends again its house of clay,
And to the greeting of the skies
With thrilling harmony replies.

A promise breathes from every furrow:
"Dark yesterday makes bright to-morrow.
Pursue no more the midnight oil;
The sunlight measures cheer and toil;
The winds proclaim, with odorous breath,
The life that triumphs over death."

Yet vanished days of many a year
Remain to us possessions dear;
We call the roll of those who dared;
We bless the saints who hardly fared,
Lending their martyred flesh to be
The torchlight of Truth's victory.

Still may we utter solemn praise
Of those whose prowess filled their days
With thoughts and deeds of high renown,
Which now our floral offerings crown.
But as our earth from south to north
Her glorious promise blazons forth,
And timid spring and summer bold
On autumn pour their wealth of gold,

So let our buried heroes live
In hands that freely guard and give,
In minds that, watchful, entertain
Great thoughts of Justice and her reign,
That tend, all other tasks above,
The household fires of faith and love,
And keep our banner, wide unfurled,
A pledge of blessing to the world.

Julia Ward Howe

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DECORATION

Manibus date lilia plenis [1]

'Mid the flower-wreathed tombs I stand,
Bearing lilies in my hand.
Comrades! in what soldier-grave
Sleeps the bravest of the brave?

Is it he who sank to rest
With his colors round his breast?
Friendship makes his tomb a shrine,
Garlands veil it; ask not mine.

One low grave, yon trees beneath,
Bears no roses, wears no wreath;
Yet no heart more high and warm
Ever dared the battle-storm.

Never gleamed a prouder eye
In the front of victory;
Never foot had firmer tread
On the field where hope lay dead,

Than are hid within this tomb,
Where the untended grasses bloom;
And no stone with feigned distress,
Mocks the sacred loneliness.

Youth and beauty, dauntless will,
Dreams that life could ne'er fulfil
Here lie buried,—here in peace
Wrongs and woes have found release.

Turning from my comrades' eyes,
Kneeling where a woman lies,
I strew lilies on the grave
Of the bravest of the brave.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson

[1] *Strew lilies with generous hands.*

FLOWERS FOR THE BRAVE

Here bring your purple and gold,
Glory of color and scent!
Scarlet of tulips bold,
Buds blue as the firmament.

Hushed is the sound of the fife
And the bugle piping clear;
The vivid and delicate life
In the soul of the youthful year.

We bring to the quiet dead,
With a gentle and tempered grief;
O'er the mounds so mute we shed
The beauty of blossoms and leaf.

The flashing swords that were drawn
No rust shall their fame destroy!
Boughs rosy as rifts of dawn,
Like the blush on the cheek of joy.

Rich fires of the gardens and meads,
We kindle these hearts above.
What splendor shall match their deeds;
What sweetness can match our love?

Celia Thaxter

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OVER THEIR GRAVES

Over their graves rang once the bugle call,
The searching shrapnel and the crashing ball;
The shriek, the shock of battle, and the neigh
Of horse; the cries of anguish and dismay;
And the loud cannon's thunders that appall.

Now through the years the brown pine-needles fall,
The vines run riot by the old stone wall,
By hedge, by meadow streamlet, far away,
Over their graves.

We love our dead where'er so held in thrall.
Than they no Greek more bravely died, nor Gaul—
A love that's deathless!—but they look today
With no reproaches on us when we say,
"Come, let us clasp your hands, we're brothers all,
Over their graves!"

Henry J. Stockard

ODE FOR DECORATION DAY

Bring flowers, to strew again
With fragrant purple rain
Of lilacs, and of roses white and red,
The dwellings of our dead—our glorious dead!
Let the bells ring a solemn funeral chime,
And wild war-music bring anew the time
    When they who sleep beneath
    Were full of vigorous breath,
And in their lusty manhood sallied forth,
    Holding in strong right hand
    The fortunes of the land,
The pride and power and safety of the North!
It seems but yesterday
The long and proud array—
But yesterday when e'en the solid rock
Shook as with earthquake shock—
As North and South, like two huge icebergs, ground
Against each other with convulsive bound.
And the whole world stood still
    To view the mighty war,
    And hear the thunderous roar,
While sheeted lightnings wrapped each plain and hill.

Alas! how few came back
From battle and from wrack!
Alas! how many lie
Beneath a Southern sky,
Who never heard the fearful fight was done,
And all they fought for, won!
Sweeter, I think, their sleep,
More peaceful and more deep,
Could they but know their wounds were not in vain;
Could they but hear the grand triumphal strain,
And see their homes unmarred by hostile tread.
Ah! let us trust it is so with our dead—
That they the thrilling joy of triumph feel,
And in that joy disdain the foeman's steel.

We mourn for all, but each doth think of one
More precious to the heart than aught beside—
Some father, brother, husband, or some son,
Who came not back, or, coming, sank and died;
In him the whole sad list is glorified!
"He fell 'fore Richmond, in the seven long days
When battle raged from morn till blood-dewed eve,
And lies there," one pale widowed mourner says,
And knows not most to triumph or to grieve.
"My boy fell at Fair Oaks," another sighs;
"And mine at Gettysburg," his neighbor cries,
And that great name each sad-eyed listener thrills.
I think of one who vanished when the press
Of battle surged along the Wilderness,
And mourned the North upon her thousand hills.
O gallant brothers of the generous South!
Foes for a day, and brothers for all time,
I charge you by the memories of our youth,
By Yorktown's field and Montezuma's clime,
Hold our dead sacred; let them quietly rest
In your unnumbered vales, where God thought best!
Your vines and flowers learned long since to forgive,
And o'er their graves a broidered mantle weave;
Be you as kind as they are, and the word
Shall reach the Northland with each summer bird,
And thoughts as sweet as summer shall awake
Responsive to your kindness, and shall make
Our peace the peace of brothers once again,
And banish utterly the days of pain.

And ye, O Northmen! be ye not outdone
In generous thought and deed.
We all do need forgiveness, every one;
And they that give shall find it in their need.
Spare of your flowers to deck the stranger's grave,
Who died for a lost cause;
A soul more daring, resolute, and brave
Ne'er won a world's applause!
(A brave man's hatred pauses at the tomb.)

For him some Southern home was robed in gloom,
Some wife or mother looked, with longing eyes,
Through the sad days and nights, with tears and sighs—
Hope slowly hardening into gaunt Despair.
Then let your foeman's grave remembrance share;
Pity a higher charm to Valor lends,
And in the realms of Sorrow all are friends.

Yes, bring fresh flowers, and strew the soldier's grave,
    Whether he proudly lies
    Beneath our Northern skies,
Or where the Southern palms their branches wave.
Let the bells toll, and wild war-music swell,
    And for one day the thought of all the past—
    Full of those memories vast—
Come back and haunt us with its mighty spell!
Bring flowers then, once again,
And strew with fragrant rain
Of lilacs, and of roses white and red,
The dwellings of our dead.

Henry Peterson

OUR NATION FOREVER

Sung at a Union Concert of Northern and Southern Songs in the Chautauqua Amphitheatre, 1883

Ring out to the stars the glad chorus!
Let bells in sweet melody chime;
Ring out to the sky bending o'er us
The chant of a nation sublime:
One land with a history glorious!
One God and one faith all victorious!

The songs of the camp-fires are blended,
The North and the South are no more;
The conflict forever is ended,
From the lakes to the palm-girded shore.

One people united forever
In hope greets the promising years;
No discord again can dissever
A Union cemented by tears.

The past shall retain but one story—
A record of courage and love;
The future shall cherish one glory,
While the stars shine responsive above.

With emotions of pride and of sorrow,
Bring roses and lilies to-day;
In the dawn of the nation's to-morrow
We garland the blue and the gray.
One land with a history glorious!
One God and one faith all victorious!

Wallace Bruce

From "Old Homestead Poems," by Wallace Bruce.
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MEMORIAL DAY

A HANDFUL of old men walking down the village street
In worn, brushed uniforms, their gray heads high;
A faded flag above them, one drum to lift their feet—
Look again, O heart of mine, and see what passes by!

There's a vast crowd swaying, there's a wild band playing,
The streets are full of marching men, of tramping cavalry.
Alive and young and straight again, they ride to greet a mate again—
The gallant souls, the great souls that live eternally!

A handful of old men walking down the highways?
Nay, we look on heroes that march among their peers,
The great, glad Companies have swung from heaven's byways
And come to join their own again across the dusty years.

There are strong hands meeting, there are staunch hearts greeting—
A crying of remembered names, of deeds that shall not die.
A handful of old men?—Nay, my heart, look well again;
The spirit of America today is marching by!

Theodosia Garrison

From "As the Larks Rise," by Theodosia Garrison.
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MEMORIAL DAY

Is it enough to think to-day
Of all our brave, then put away
The thought until a year has sped?
Is this full honor for our dead?

Is it enough to sing a song
And deck a grave; and all year long
Forget the brave who died that we
Might keep our great land proud and free?

Full service needs a greater toll—
That we who live give heart and soul
To keep the land they died to save,
And be ourselves, in turn, the brave!

Annette Wynne

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THE MARCH

I heard a voice that cried, "Make way for those who died!"
And all the colored crowd like ghosts at morning fled;
And down the waiting road, rank after rank there strode,
In mute and measured march a hundred thousand dead.

A hundred thousand dead, with firm and noiseless tread,
All shadowy-gray yet solid, with faces gray and ghast,
And by the house they went, and all their brows were bent
Straight forward; and they passed, and passed, and passed,
and passed.

But O there came a place, and O there came a face,
That clenched my heart to see it, and sudden turned my way;
And in the face that turned I saw two eyes that burned,
Never-forgotten eyes, and they had things to say.

Like desolate stars they shone one moment, and were gone,
And I sank down and put my arms across my head,
And felt them moving past, nor looked to see the last,
In steady silent march, our hundred thousand dead.

John C. Squire

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THE SLEEP OF THE BRAVE

How sleep the brave, who sink to rest,
By all their country's wishes blessed!
When Spring, with dewy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallowed mold,
She there shall dress a sweeter sod
Than Fancy's feet have ever trod.

By fairy hands their knell is rung;
By forms unseen their dirge is sung;
There Honor comes, a pilgrim gray,
To bless the turf that wraps their clay;
And Freedom shall awhile repair,
To dwell a weeping hermit there!

William Collins

A BALLAD OF HEROES

Because you passed, and now are not,—
Because, in some remoter day,
Your sacred dust from doubtful spot
Was blown of ancient airs away,—
Because you perished,—must men say
Your deeds were naught, and so profane
Your lives with that cold burden? Nay,
The deeds you wrought are not in vain!

Though, it may be, above the plot
That hid your once imperial clay,
No greener than o'er men forgot
The unregarding grasses sway;—
Though there no sweeter is the lay
From careless bird,—though you remain
Without distinction of decay,—
The deeds you wrought are not in vain!

No. For while yet in tower or cot
Your story stirs the pulses' play;
And men forget the sordid lot—
The sordid care, of cities gray;—
While yet, beset in homelier fray.
They learn from you the lesson plain
That Life may go, so Honour stay,—
The deeds you wrought are not in vain!

Envoy

Heroes of old! I humbly lay
The laurel on your graves again;
Whatever men have done, men may,—
The deeds you wrought are not in vain.

Austin Dobson

SPRING IN WAR-TIME

I feel the spring far off, far off,
    The faint, far scent of bud and leaf—
Oh, how can spring take heart to come
    To a world in grief,
    Deep grief?

The sun turns north, the days grow long,
    Later the evening star grows bright—
How can the daylight linger on
    For men to fight,
    Still fight?

The grass is waking in the ground,
    Soon it will rise and blow in waves—
How can it have the heart to sway
    Over the graves,
    New graves?

Under the boughs where lovers walked
    The apple-blooms will shed their breath—
But what of all the lovers now
    Parted by Death,
    Grey Death?

Sara Teasdale

From "Rivers to the Sea," by Sara Teasdale.
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REQUIESCANT

In lonely watches night by night
Great visions burst upon my sight,
For down the stretches of the sky
The hosts of dead go marching by.

Strange ghostly banners o'er them float,
Strange bugles sound an awful note,
And all their faces and their eyes
Are lit with starlight from the skies.

The anguish and the pain have passed
And peace hath come to them at last,
But in the stern looks linger still
The iron purpose and the will.

Dear Christ, who reign'st above the flood
Of human tears and human blood,
A weary road these men have trod,
O house them in the home of God!

Frederick George Scott

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THE SOLDIER'S GRAVE

Strew lightly o'er the soldier's grave
The springtime blossoms fresh and white,
And deck with wreaths and garlands bright
The silent couches of the brave.

They fought—they died—they lie at rest
Beneath yon low and grassy mounds;
No more for them the trumpet sounds
To thrill the patriotic breast.

But though they mingle with the dust
In that dark kingdom, where Decay
Sits thronéd in his halls of clay,
Their memory is free from rust.

For well we love to honor those
Who bravely fell amid the fight,
Who sank in all their vanquished might
Upon the field among their foes.

We honor both—the blue, the gray—
For time hath blotted from the mind
All bitter thoughts and words unkind
And washed all prejudice away.

And we remember only this,—
They bravely fought—they bravely died;
And, hero-like, their souls should ride
Along the ether seas of bliss.

Then spread upon each grave today
The fragrant blossoms of the spring,
And simple wreaths and garlands fling
Above the soldier's honored clay.

Henry D. Muir

TAPS

Sleep
Now the charge is won,
Sleep in the narrow clod;
Now it is set of sun,
Sleep till the trump of God.
Sleep.

Sleep.
Fame is a bugle call
Blown past a crumbling wall,
Battles are clean forgot,
Captains and towns are not,
Sleep shall outlast them all.
Sleep.

Lisette Woodworth Reese

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REQUIEM

When the last voyage is ended,
And the last sail is furled,
When the last blast is weathered,
And the last bolt is hurled,
And there comes no more the sound of the old ship bell—
Sailor, sleep well!

When the last Post is blown,
And the last volley fired,
When the last sod is thrown,
And the last Foe retired,
And thy last bivouac is made under the ground—
Soldier, sleep sound!

Joseph Lee

REQUIEM FOR A YOUNG SOLDIER

Peace to-night, heroic spirit!
    Pain is overpast.
All the strife with life is ended;
    You may rest at last.

The devotion that, amazing,
    Welled from out the deep
Of your being, no more needed,
    Quiet you may sleep:

Sleep, who, giving all for others,
    Battled till the victory nigh,
You, too, toil and heart-break over,
    Had the right to die! . . .

We may guard the grave that holds you,
    As a shrine of Truth
Lighted by the pure devotion
    Of your radiant youth;

We, you died for, may forget you!
    You will have no care,
Who, content, to-night are sleeping—
    Painless, dreamless, there!

Florence Earle Coates

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A LAMENTATION

All looks be pale, hearts cold as stone,
For Hally now is dead and gone.
Hally in whose sight,
Most sweet sight,
All the earth late took delight.
Every eye, weep with me,
Joys drowned in tears must be.

His ivory skin, his comely hair,
His rosy cheeks so clear and fair,
Eyes that once did grace
His bright face,
Now in him all want their place.
Eyes and hearts, weep with me.
For who so kind as he?

His youth was like an April flower,
Adorned with beauty, love, and power.
Glory strewed his way,
Whose wreaths gay
Now are all turnéd to decay.
Then, again, weep with me,
None feel more cause than we.

No more may his wished sight return.
His golden lamp no more can burn,
Quenched is all his flame,
His hoped fame
Now hath left him nought but name.
For him all weep with me,
Since more him none shall see.

Thomas Campion

CORONACH [1]

He is gone on the mountain,
He is lost to the forest,
Like a summer-dried fountain,
When our need was the sorest.
The font, reappearing,
From the rain-drops shall borrow,
But to us comes no cheering,
To Duncan no morrow!

The hand of the reaper
Takes the ears that are hoary,
But the voice of the weeper
Wails manhood in glory.
The autumn winds rushing
Waft the leaves that are serest,
But our flower was in flushing,
When blighting was nearest.

Fleet foot on the correi,[2]
Sage counsel in cumber,[3]
Red hand in the foray,
How sound is thy slumber!
Like the dew on the mountain,
Like the foam on the river,
Like the bubble on the fountain,
Thou art gone, and for ever.

Sir Walter Scott

[1] *Dirge, lament*
[2] *Vast hill-hollow*
[3] *Danger or defeat*

THE HEROIC AGE

He speaks not well who doth his time deplore,
Naming it new and little and obscure,
Ignoble and unfit for lofty deeds.
All times were modern in the time of them,
And this no more than others. Do thy part
Here in the living day, as did the great
Who made old days immortal! So shall men,
Gazing long back to this far-looming hour,
Say: "Then the time when men were truly men:
Tho' wars grew less, their spirits met the test
Of new conditions; conquering civic wrong;
Saving the state anew by virtuous lives;
Guarding the country's honor as their own,
And their own as their country's and their sons':
Proclaiming service the one test of worth;
Defying leaguèd fraud with single truth;
Knights of the spirit; warriors in the cause
Of justice absolute 'twixt man and man;
Not fearing loss; and daring to be pure.
When error through the land raged like a pest
They calmed the madness caught from mind to mind
By wisdom drawn from eld, and counsel sane;
And as the martyrs of the ancient world
Gave Death for man, so nobly gave they Life:
Those the great days, and that the heroic age."

Richard Watson Gilder

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LET WAR'S TEMPESTS CEASE

Lord, let war's tempests cease,
Fold the whole world in peace
    Under Thy wings.
Make all the nations one,
All hearts beneath the sun,
Till Thou shalt reign alone,
    Great King of Kings.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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